Filipinos Settle in the Canadian North: Unsettling a Gendered Frontier

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Abstract

This paper explores how contemporary accounts of Filipino settlement in the Yukon articulate with the imaginative project of a 'frontier Yukon.' Since 2007, Whitehorse, Yukon has been as a prominent site of settlement for Filipino newcomers to Canada. This has been supported by the implementation of a new immigration policy–the Yukon Nominee Program (YNP)—inaugurated to address shortages in the territory's service sector labour market. What happens, we ask, to frontier narratives when they are put into conversation with bodies, peoples, places, and collective experiences that they were never meant to narrate? We discuss how hegemonic notions of race, gender, and frontier masculinity are reworked and unsettled in emerging narratives of Filipino settlement. In working through multiple and contested notions of the frontier, we play on varying meanings of the verb "to settle." Frontier mythologies seek to settle the disruptive potential of Filipino workers and families as they newly inhabit borderline spaces. At the same time, the hard work of "settling" into a foreign environment is set both within and against the hegemonic facade of frontier mythology. We find that while the examined discourses of arrival in the Yukon reinforce hegemonic accounts of the Yukon's settlement, and obscure histories of settler colonialism through their celebration of multiculturalism and diversity, they also contain moments of ambiguity that "unmap" hegemonic frontier narratives.

Keywords: Filipino labour migration; settler colonialism; Yukon; frontier; gender

Introduction

This is the law of the Yukon, and ever she makes it plain;
"Send not your foolish and feeble; send me your strong and your sane […]
Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit to the core; […]
Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons; […]"
Robert Service, *The Law of the Yukon*

Figure 1. Cutting through an icy frontier. © Cold Paradise Productions Inc.

The documentary film *Cold Paradise* opens with a shot of the Yukon's infamous frozen landscape. The sun sits low in the sky and snow blows over the Yukon River. After a few moments, a woman's voice begins to describe the scene: "Famous for its cold climate and the Klondike Gold Rush at the turn of the century, Yukon, Canada has been experiencing an employment rush as new Filipinos discover opportunities for work…" Abruptly, the film switches to a shot of a Filipina woman answering a phone at a local hotel. And then another scene: a generic image of a tropical beach. The narrator continues: "exchanging tropical beaches for a hot economy and a chance for their families to join them." Finally, the viewer observes a Filipina woman maneuvering a dogsled, her red winter anorak nearly trailing at her feet (Figure

1). As the film returns to the opening winter landscape, the narrator asks, "What sacrifices would you make for your family?"

Made in 2013 by documentary filmmaker and Whitehorse resident Werner Walcher, *Cold Paradise* is intended to alert Yukoners to the difficulties faced by Filipino newcomers to Whitehorse (Ronson 2013).[1] It is a story of trials: of long periods of family separation, low-paid work, self-sacrifice and a challenging cultural and environmental adjustment in Northern Canada. The film also speaks of triumph and perseverance, and offers a celebration of the tremendous growth of the Yukon's Filipino community from a population of approximately 300 in 2007 to approximately 2500 in 2013. It is no mere coincidence that the expansion of the Filipino community is depicted as an 'employment rush'. In Whitehorse, frontier mythology is ubiquitous. The city is dotted with numerous public historical monuments and displays celebrating the Klondike Gold Rush: a bronze-cast and steely prospector equipped with axe and dog sled are etched on Main Street; the sternwheeler SS Klondike which once ran freight between Whitehorse and Dawson City is now marooned on the banks of the Yukon River; and one can peruse the MacBride Museum of Yukon History to view its preserved archive of the colonial Northern frontier. Plaques alongside the Yukon River commemorate the tales and tribulations of bold and intrepid (white) settlers who faced the river's formidable rapids to find their luck in the Gold Rush. Tourist pamphlets offer Gold Rush themed adventures, restaurants feature cliché slogans, and bookstores feature displays of celebrated Klondike histories. This landscape makes legible a muscular narrative of grit and violence, of impossible odds and fortitude.

[1] The film premiered at the Available Light Film Festival in Whitehorse in 2013. It also aired on OMNI TV in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta in both English and Tagalog. It is currently available online: https://vimeo.com/ondemand/coldparadise

In Walcher's film, frontier motifs and tropes act as resources for making sense of the arrival of Filipinos in the territory. Throughout the film, the camera consistently returns to the footage of the Filipina woman in the snow, her red anorak brightly lit against the sparkly white backdrop. Here we see a German immigrant man profiling a Filipina woman through imagery that draws on the vernacular texts of the Yukon's frontier history. The director's use of contrasting imagery reinforces frontier mythology by throwing into stark relief the boldness of the journey north from the temperate climate of the south, mimicking the journeys of pioneers ('sourdoughs') bound for the Klondike.

This is precisely what Elizabeth Furniss (1999) terms the "frontier cultural complex", the sheer "hegemonic bulk" of frontier narratives, images, public values and identities: an archive that gets mobilized and put to work to celebrate and (re)inscribe Canadian colonialism. And yet, the material presence of Filipinos in Whitehorse intervenes and disrupts popular representations of the Yukon's history that have long held sway in the public imagination. How does the universalizing force of frontier mythology—a cornerstone of Canadian national identity and films like Walcher's—grapple with new stories of the Yukon's settlement and the demographic changes wrought by a need for inexpensive labour? What happens to frontier narratives when they are put into conversation with bodies, peoples, places, and collective experiences that they were never meant to narrate? We pick up these questions in exploring how frontier mythology becomes unsettled with the arrival of Filipina women in the Canadian North; a good number of whom have benefited from their migration through the Yukon Nominee Program (YNP). The YNP was inaugurated in 2007 to address shortages in Whitehorse's labour market, and it allows employers to import workers for jobs for which they cannot find Canadian citizens or permanent residents. The YNP has been used strategically by some in the Filipino community, and has

enabled an expanding and substantive familial network in Whitehorse that originated with seven Filipina women who found employment in the Yukon as live-in caregivers during the mid-1980s and early 1990s, and who subsequently managed to bring large numbers of their family members from the Philippines to Canada through this particular migration program (see Johnston and Pratt 2017). In Whitehorse, questions of frontier mythology occupy spaces variously intimate and highly public. They are nestled in the family relationships and migratory networks which have channeled Filipino immigration in Whitehorse; they sit as well in public reactions to newcomers, and the stories that are told to make sense of Filipino arrival. They are also tied to state-managed discourses of multiculturalism that portray the Yukon's immigration policy as a site of progress, inclusion, leadership, and gender equality.

Certainly notions of securing a better future through sacrifice, hard work, perseverance, fortitude, and risk taking are common experiences and narratives among Filipino migrants in many places (e.g., Coloma et al. 2012, Pratt 2012, Tadiar 2012). And yet as these common tropes are absorbed within a powerful frontier narrative in the Yukon, they work in distinctive ways to secure a place for Filipinos both within white settler colonial society and in relation to Indigenous communities in the city and region. Unlike many metropolitan areas that have been significant sites of Filipino settlement in Canada (i.e. Vancouver, Toronto), more than half (53%) of Indigenous people in Yukon live in Whitehorse and represent 16% of the city's total population (Statistics Canada 2016). Filipino settlement in Yukon takes shape somewhat differently than it does in large metropolitan centres in southern Canada, in part because of the way it is absorbed within frontier mythology in this context. We ask how frontier narratives of Filipino arrival may (inadvertently) rewrite the settler population as 'natives' or as a founding population. Working through multiple and contested notions of the frontier, we play deliberately

on the varying meanings of the verb "to settle." Frontier mythologies seek to settle the disruptive potential of Filipino workers and families as they newly inhabit borderline spaces. At the same time, the hard work of "settling in" to a foreign environment is set both within and against the hegemonic facade of frontier narratives. We draw from a series of interviews with Filipino immigrants and government officials, as well as policy and media analysis to work through contested re-orderings of race, gender, and masculinity in the imaginative project of a frontier Yukon.[2]

Frontier Masculinities at the Edge of Empire

"The frontier myth," Furniss (1999) writes, "through its set of symbols, metaphors, and narrative structures, provides a structured way of looking at history in which "truths" are communicated intuitively and indirectly, appealing to imagination, fantasy, and emotion" (187**).** In the Yukon, the frontier obscures the violent dispossession of indigenous lands by continuously mythologizing the agential capacities of the (white) settlers who sought their fortunes in the north. Lurking within Whitehorse's commonplace Gold Rush imagery is the implicit and explicit racing and gendering of frontier mythology. To see this clearly requires a brief detour to outline the frontier rhetoric against which the story of Filipino arrival in the Yukon is written, and the configurations of race and masculinity that it unsettles.

Figures and qualities of "frontier masculinity" are a characteristic feature of the gendered ideologies of settler societies in both their past and present iterations (Connell 1993; Anahita and Mix 2006; Hogan and Purcell 2008). More generally, the frontier describes a zone of encounter

[2] The research was conducted over the course of six trips to Whitehorse, which ranged from three days to two weeks. Interviews were carried out with fifteen members of the Filipino community in Whitehorse, as well as two government representatives. Filipino interviewees were asked about their migration histories and to reflect on their lives and the Filipino community in Whitehorse.

between Indigenous peoples and (white) settlers, what the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1994 [1893]) famously described as "the outer edge of the wave–the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (32). Turner saw the 'frontier spirit' as the crucible for the successful expansion of national territory and character; a masculinist ideology of progress based in self-sacrificing individualism**.** With the 'discovery' of gold in the Klondike in 1898, the frontier spirit arrived in the Yukon in dramatic fashion, with thousands of American and Canadian prospectors pouring in seemingly overnight.[3] Prior to the Gold Rush, the Yukon was remotely connected to the Canadian economy through the fur trade, and the settler population was small. From the vantage of the present, the opening of the mining frontier in the Yukon forms a hegemonic origin story of the arrival of Western civilization into the Yukon wilderness.

Popular representations of the gold rush emphasize what Turner described as "the traits of the frontier": a deeply gendered ideology that emphasizes machismo, curiosity, freedom, and rugged individualism (Kikkert and Lackenbauer 2017). Robert Service's famous poem—*The Law of the Yukon*—imagined the journey of pioneers pitted against a lawless, demonic, and ultimately feminized landscape against which only the strongest masculinity could survive (Grace 2001). Klondike mining, one Yukon guidebook concluded in 1897, "is the toughest kind of work. It compels great sacrifices of comfort and constant attention to business. It is no child's play" (quoted in Beyreis 2005). Self-reliance, initiative and know how were necessary to conquer the harsh northern landscape. Men possessing these qualities, one Yukon newspaper reported in 1916, "came and conquered. 'Twas the cussedest land one could find. But they came and triumphed" (quoted in Kikkert and Lackenbauer 2017). Only a certain masculine subject could survive and prosper in the harsh, foreign climate of an unsettled Yukon. Today, a plaque in

[3] See Cruikshank (1998) for a discussion of how Indigenous accounts of the Gold Rush have been subsumed within official frontier narratives.

the Whitehorse MacBride Museum of History captures this sentiment, praising the writings of Jack London and Robert Service for documenting "a rugged land, inhabited by hardy individuals with a capacity for hard work and an appetite for luxury."

Geographers have argued that masculinities are historically and geographically specific, shaped by the spaces and places that fashion different identities (Berg and Longhurst 2003). Normative Yukon frontier masculinities emerge from broader popular tropes but are continuously refracted through localized historical geographies and social experiences. Kikkert and Lackenbauer (2017) argue that Yukoner frontier identities were forged through the collision of two types of frontier mythologies: the American, Turnerian-inspired theme of rugged, masculine individualism and the British 'imperial adventurer', men who travelled to the far reaches of Empire in the pursuit of adventure and riches: "Local articulations of Anglo-Saxon frontier masculinity connected to broader imperial tropes, but these articulations adopted distinctive forms that reflected how Yukoners imagined their particular identities" (211). Their study of Dawson City newspaper coverage of the first world war identifies how localized understandings of manliness inherited from the Gold Rush re-emerged in the context of the war, producing Yukon men as ideal soldiers due to their real "frontier experience."

However, while men were praised for exercising their agentive capacities, Connell (1993) notes that frontier masculinities were also sites of anxiety. Klondike mining camps, for example, were often reviled in the press as lawless places that were filled with crime and devoid of morality (Beyreis 2005). Few women travelled to the rush; those who did were often sex workers whose alleged licentious nature threatened the virtuous endeavours of pioneering men. Settler states often attempted to rectify these anxieties by encouraging family settlement (Connell 1993, 612). In Dawson City, for example, families often migrated and settled as entire units (Porsild

1998). At the same time, the relative absence of white women from the rush of settlement gave rise to particular configurations of frontier masculinity, race, and sexuality. Given the 'sexual imbalance' in the territory, Yukon historian Kenneth Coates (1993) writes, certain demands were placed on Indigenous women in order to fulfill men's "sexual needs" (84). While Indigenous women had their own reasons for participating in encounters with white men, these perspectives are not addressed in dominant histories of the Yukon's settlement (Cruikshank 1992). Even so, these relationships were of material consequence to Indigenous women—who could lose status alongside their children as a result of unions with white men through the Indian Act. Accounts of sexual encounters originating in "lust and loneliness" (Coates 1993, 89) naturalize ideas of frontier masculinity and sexuality, demonstrating an enduring link between material geographical and economic expansion and normative notions of white settler masculinity.[4]

As the gold rush wound down, the Yukon experienced a significant outmigration of settlers. "Because of its northern location and economic instability", argues Coates (1993), "the Yukon remained a frontier society. Few long-term settlers came north; the workforce was sustained instead by a continuous circulation of transient workers" (89). Those settlers who did remain pursued a frontier ethos of white superiority, especially in towns such as Whitehorse. Whitehorse itself began as a small settlement on the banks of the Yukon River, on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwäch'än peoples. After gold was found near Dawson City in 1896, two enterprising men set up a business transporting prospectors down a perilous section of the river—Miles Canyon—on their way to the rush. Yet for all its male individualism, Whitehorse was shaped as much by collective racism as by the entrepreneurial 'frontier spirit.' The construction of the railway in 1899 displaced Indigenous families living along the

[4] See, for example, Arvin et al (2013), Simpson (2014), and Morgensen (2011) for further discussion of gender, sexuality, and heteropatriarchy in settler colonialism.

waterfront. Afterward, and despite the town's economic reliance on Indigenous seasonal labor, Whitehorse residents would go to great lengths to exclude Indigenous people from urban spaces, pressuring the federal government to create formal reserves outside of city limits (Coates and Morrison 2005).

However, while idealized frontier spaces were undeniably white and male, the supposed openness of the frontier landscape also enabled conflicting and contradictory fantasies about the race and gender in the north (Hurst 2016). Notions of the frontier have also been crafted through the contestation of frontier masculinity. Beginning in the 1970s, feminist historians began to rethink the role of middle class white women in the Gold Rush, often arguing that they represent the "real pioneers" of the Yukon's history (Porsild 2000). Non-Indigenous women in Yukon politics are also commonly referred to a "political pioneers", evoking the idea that the Yukon has opened new frontiers of gender equality in Canada (Hayden 1999). In both cases, the category of pioneer stretches the meanings of northern identity, while firmly excluding Indigenous women from its purview.

Racial equality too has been read into alternative conceptions of the frontier myth. During the rush, for example, Yukon became home to prospectors of diverse races and nationalities. Later newspapers depicted Yukoners as a "cosmopolitan people", and Yukon men as more adaptable and amenable to difference than men elsewhere in Canada (Kikkert and Lackenbauer 2017). As Whitehorse now attempts to reimagine itself as a multicultural frontier, Gold Rush histories continue to be drawn upon to make sense of the present. In 2014, then Minister of Employment and Social Development Jason Kenney expressed his enthusiasm for Filipino workers and families during a visit to Whitehorse. Looking to capture the significance of immigration to this part of Canada, he proclaimed:

> […] it's been said often that northwest Canada is the newest part of the New World, and if that's true, it's most true of Yukon. This is a place with a limitless future, and it's so exciting to see just the little signs of that in my brief time here already. Getting off the airplane yesterday, I heard, for me, the familiar sounds of Tagalog with new members of the Filipino community joining you to make Yukon their new home. And I can see the growing diversity here as newcomers arrive… this is the sound of diversity and growth, of energy that we are seeing and feeling all around us in these amazing days in this territory (Kenney 2014).

Here, Kenney welcomes Filipino families as future citizens and contributing members of the Yukon community. Tagalog suddenly becomes a familiar sound of "diversity and growth", and on this frontier, the permanent settlement of Filipino families is imagined as an optimistic and welcomed sign of future progress—a 'limitless' horizon.

Stories surrounding Filipino settlement in the Yukon are both disruptive and familiar. They draw on and animate older frontier fantasies, whilst powerfully re-gendering, re-racing and re-purposing frontier tropes. What do new narratives of the Yukon's settlement tell us of the sticky and colliding in-between spaces of national progress, a (de)colonial present, and potential spaces of disruption? We turn to tracing the recent arrival of Filipinos in Whitehorse. This is a story of community settlement that has become a well-entrenched narrative through which Filipino arrival in the North often gets explained and situated. We note that we are telling a specific version of Filipino migration and settlement, and likely do so at the cost of other perspectives, stories and histories. However, our purpose is to document one trajectory and lineage of Filipino settlement in the Yukon in order to more fully glean the re-ordering of a gendered frontier, and to understand the way in which a colonial frontier discourse works to

organize disparate and diverse experiences of immigration into a unified whole. The following Filipino arrival narrative is one that circulates widely in mainstream press, and within both our policy-oriented interviews and in conversations with members of the Whitehorse Filipino community. Many of these stories offered complex narratives of self-sacrificing, hard working pioneer entrepreneurs who have propelled the growth and expansion of the Filipino community, a narrative that has become (in a sense) its own embedded frontier mythology.

Filipinas Settling In

When the first Filipina women arrived in the Yukon by plane in the 1980s, an article in a national magazine *The Walrus* reports, they mistook the snow on the mountains for sand (Keevil 2016). The landscape was cold, foreign, and difficult. There were few Filipino faces in town to evoke a sense of familiarity. Settling in and making a life in the Yukon required ingenuity, adaptation and persistence. It was, much like gold prospecting, no child's play. The frontier, Anna Tsing (2005) explains, is "a traveling theory, a foreign form requiring translation" (31). Tsing is writing of the meaning of the frontier in resource economies of Southeast Asia; how past frontier imaginaries violently encounter local contexts and are shaped by them. In the Yukon, translation takes on a different register. It demands that we ask how frontier associations are *made available* to Filipina women, and in particular, how the fictions of the frontier myth are layered over a discourse of development that has long characterized migration from the global south to the global north. What draws these together—the tension between the attributes associated with old pioneers and the new stories of Filipino arrival—is the persistence of a narrative of progress that is symbolically realized in the movement to the North and the exploration of the Yukon's hitherto unexploited opportunities.

Between 2007 and 2016, 410 workers from the Philippines came to the Yukon through the Yukon Nominee Program. They came first on temporary work visas with a contract tied to a specific employer. The YNP created the opportunity to gain permanent resident status relatively quickly. Almost all were admitted to Canada as low-skilled workers under the Critical Impact Program within the YNP: food counter attendants, light duty cleaners, cashiers, sales clerks, and store shelf stockers are among the most common 'critical impact' occupations.[5] Repeating a pattern of racialized labour migration noted elsewhere in Canada, Filipinos are routinely over-represented among critical impact (as compared to skilled) workers in the Yukon: half of all critical impact workers are from the Philippines, and only 12% of Filipinos come as skilled workers as compared to 68% of those coming from places other than the Philippines. But in contrast to national trends vis-a-vis low skilled temporary work programs, service sector Filipino workers quickly become permanent immigrants with the right to settle in Canada and to sponsor their dependents. The territorial government's effort to retain new immigrants through the YNP and family sponsorship speaks to the challenges of building a permanent workforce in the Canadian North, and labour shortages that have long persisted in the Yukon (Wingrove 2014).

While narratives of hard work, sacrifice, and self-made entrepreneurialism reverberate within the lives of Filipino migrants elsewhere (e.g. Pratt 2012), they resonate in a particularly potent way with the idealised potential of the frontier that is at work in the Yukon's immigration policy**.** At the same time, the work of "settling in" is a site where the narratives of Yukon's frontier history become confused and reordered. The story begins

[5] Unpublished data provided by the Yukon Government's Department of Education.

with the arrival of Soccoro Alfonso, a Filipina nanny who immigrated to the Yukon as a live-in caregiver in 1986. Her story was recorded for the *Yukon News* in 2013, where she is described as lucky, having been able to find work in Whitehorse after her temporary work contract ended and in ultimately receiving permanent residency:

> She's a pioneer and I definitely recognize her for that," said Joy Allen, co-owner of Whitehorse's KFC branch. "She created a ripple effect of helping others." Allen also came to Whitehorse as a nanny, when Alfonso found her an employer. Allen, who is also originally from the Philippines, found sponsors for around eight of her domestic worker friends in Singapore, she said. Eventually, Allen and Alfonso became part of the first 10 Filipina nannies in the territory. When they arrived, there were only around four other Filipina women who preceded them, but they came to Canada by marrying Yukoners, Alfonso said (Alarcon 2013a).

Soccoro's story is important because it represents what has become a somewhat legendary pioneering narrative detailing the origins of Filipino settlement in Whitehorse. Soccoro's story provides the foundation for a mythology of arrival that can be traced back to a small group of Filipina women who met in Singapore while working as domestic helpers in the 1980s. Soccoro left to work in the Yukon as a live-in domestic worker in 1984, and by the early 1990s, she had assisted others to join her, also as live-in caregivers. A Filipina woman who identified herself as the fourth nanny to arrive from the Philippines via Singapore, described how she came to Whitehorse in 1989:

> So what happened was Joy came, and then she was working for a family, and the family had a friend and you know she was telling, you know, all the successful stories and you know how their lives made it easy having Joy in the home looking

> after the children while you know the employers are running after the business. So the same story followed with Liberty. And then Liberty you know, while I was in Singapore, said "Hey you know there is an employer here interested in employing one." So. I said, "Wow" (Interview 1).

She estimates that there were perhaps 20 other Filipinos scattered across the Yukon when she arrived. In Whitehorse, the Filipino community began to grow slowly through a network of "friends helping friends" (Interview 2), and many from this small group of Filipino domestic workers that immigrated to the Yukon in the 1980s and 90s successfully gained permanent residency after the completion of their temporary employment contracts. They were then able to sponsor immediate relatives to come to Canada, as well as find employers for other friends and relatives in the Philippines through federal immigration programs. The personal migration networks that were created during this period were crucial to the Filipino community's ability and position to capitalize when the YNP was introduced in 2007.

In the 1990s, the numbers of Filipino migrants continued to grow at a slow and steady pace. A number with whom we spoke recalled the intimacy of the Filipino community:

> It was very small, in 1995. I think there were just a few. It might be a few hundred, I don't know, we could look at the stats. But there's just a few hundred, and there's really just a few. So we would get together in someone's basement and we would have a party there, and get together and eat. And so Christmas parties were in the basement of a home and so very small. And you kind of get closer to each other because there's just a few of you. And we eat what we kind of miss at home. It was intimate because, just a few people. And you know each other and it's like you're

> my cousin or you're my relative even though you're not. But since you came from the Philippines now all a sudden, it's instant connection (Interview 2).

These words relay the distance between the Philippines and the Yukon, and the sense of community that grows between those who find themselves so far away from home. The image that accompanies this scene—a large group of Filipinos in a basement in a home in Whitehorse—perhaps reads strangely into a popular imagination that figures the Yukon as a remote and rugged wilderness.[6] The possible sense of isolation also implies the challenges through which a community settles in and transforms this foreign landscape, and how newcomers must acclimatize themselves to strangeness.

The original group of nannies who came in the 1980s and early 1990s have been, in general, tremendously successful. They have purchased property and some have started their own businesses. "Filipinos, one thing that I know is that they're very ambitious", a Filipina woman claimed, "They don't just stop there. They always say, okay what's next, what's next" (Interview 2). One of these pioneering Filipina women co-owns a local fast food franchise, one works in administration for the territorial government, one works as a bookkeeper or accountant, one runs her own janitorial contract company, and another co-owned the local Filipino grocery store for some time (Forrest 2015). The success of the nannies laid the foundation for the 'boom' of immigration that has followed through a large network of 5-7 main family groups (which are sometimes referred to as clans, Interview 3). The progress of later Filipino immigrants can be viewed in part as a process of descent that originates in the figures of the first nannies. The sense that these women are pioneers, those who 'forged a path' for others is very significant. The

[6] For example, the 2017 film *Frozen in Time* by Bill Morrison illustrates the contemporary relevance of this imaginary by emphasizing the historical remoteness of the Yukon through the perspectives of white settlers, ultimately depicting the territory as a white space in which Indigenous peoples have been pushed to the margins.

reference, in one sense, rightly refers to the boldness of making a life elsewhere and facilitating that journey for others. It also demonstrates the discursive mechanisms through which the language of frontier mythology settles into new accounts of arrival.

"Bringing the Village"

The figure of the pioneer becomes more powerful in retrospect: it means little to have forged a path if nothing followed. Frontier mythology requires an origin story in order to maintain its explanatory power in the present. This is true, too, of the story of the nannies as relayed above, which derives its mythology from the dramatic expansion of the Filipino population in the years following the implementation of the YNP. One interviewee argued that when the program started, "that was the start of the influx. The kind of gold rush" (Interview 2): "that was basically the start of the exodus [from particular *barangays*, or communities, in the Philippines]. And that was, boom, wow, woah! Everyday there's people coming, Filipinos coming. And then two years later they get their permanent resident status, now they can sponsor their relatives. So then exponentially it increased. Exponentially" (Interview 2). This interviewee casually adopts the language of the frontier to describe the dramatic growth of the Filipino population since 2007. The language of a "boom" or a "rush" of opportunity subtly situates Filipino immigration as a wave of settlement that sits in parallel with the foundational acts from which this vocabulary derives.

However, Whitehorse's "rush" of Filipino settlement is gendered differently from the rugged masculinities of the Klondike Gold Rush. The gender dynamics of immigration were emphasized in an interview with a manager within the Yukon government:

> Since the inception of the nominee [program], so 2007-2014, we received about -- I would say probably around 900 principle applicants and 1500 with their dependents. So those are spouses and children. And I use on purpose the word spouse because most of the initial immigrants were women. So a large number of immigrants in the territory were usually women who came to work in the food service and tourism and retail and so and so forth. So usually the husbands and the children came later on. So of course it's a very interesting pattern also from the women's perspective where the initial immigrants, the large group were actually women (Interview 4).[7]

It *is* interesting that the majority of primary applicants to the YNP are women. These remarks reveal the underlying assumption that the families reunited are those of a nuclear family, one who is led by an immigrant mother who first gains access to Canada so that her family may follow. The influx of Filipino service workers under the nominee program has been accompanied by waves of family reunification that are reflective of the territorial government's desire to retain a consistent (and permanent) work force in the Yukon. At the same time, the openness and even overt celebration of family relationships indicates a clear shift in the gender dynamics of frontier mythology.

It would be a significant misstep to relate the YNP's "success" in the territory as a linear narrative of labour shortages and subsequent state recruitment. That over half of Yukon nominees have arrived from the Philippines is also the result of the deliberate actions and organization of Filipinos residing in the territory prior to 2007; it reflects the entrepreneurial ingenuity and spirit of the pioneers. Several of the original nannies are now employers who have themselves recruited service sector workers through the nominee program, and their enterprise went far beyond this. One woman, who co-owns a fast food franchise, "brought her village here

[7] Statistics reflect total applicants for the nominee program. Filipinos comprise 53% of total primary applicants.

[…] Friends, neighbors, extended family […] she just brought the village" (Interview 7). A government official stated that several of the successful nannies had seized the opportunity of an initially under-regulated immigration program by approaching Whitehorse employers to say: "Looks like you need some people working in your business," presenting resumes of family members and doing the necessary paperwork to enable these employers to nominate their relatives through the YNP (Interview 5).[8] "And these nannies, so when they came, they created all these connections," a Filipino journalist elaborated, "So for example, Subway needs workers. They're going to say, 'Okay, I have a cousin in this town in the Philippines and she's eligible and ready to go'. And so Subway would take that person. And so they have become sort of the ad hoc recruitment agents" (Interview 6). Another of the first nanny/immigrants estimates that she has helped to bring more than 30 family members, who have then sponsored their dependents. Altogether she estimates that she has helped 75 relatives and people from her village through the YNP (Interview 8). An article in a national magazine, *The Walrus*, states that one of the first 'pioneers' almost "single-handedly transplanted a community from the Philippines to Whitehorse" (Keevil 2016).

While friendship networks and family connections helped the Filipino community grow in the 1990s, the nominee program opened the doors for further migration and sponsorship of family members. "It's all family members," one Filipino interviewee put it, "What I've heard is that under the Yukon Nominee Program – because my understanding before, it's a little bit lax in terms of bringing people in Yukon under the Yukon Nominee Program. So many members of their family, maybe the 7 families that you might be referring to: 'Okay you want to come to Canada? Sure.' So the availability of that Yukon Nominee Program, when after about 6 months I

[8] According to this same government representative in recent years the program has become more closely regulated: the government has added a language requirement, contacts the prospective employer and more closely scrutinizes the suitability of work experience for the job being filled in Yukon.

think they can apply for permanent residency, [was important]. And that's why the population of the Filipino community grew from 1990 to probably until now" (Interview 1). This account of family migration relates how the growth of the Filipino population is enmeshed in a complicated network of family, business, and government interests. The Yukon's retention rate hovers around 90% across the entire nominee program (Interview 4); an indication that nominees consistently find the means to build a life for themselves after their enrollment in the program has ended.

The strong sense of community support threaded throughout these accounts is often taken up in ways that suggest the civilizing presence of Filipino families in Whitehorse. Working within the broad strokes of race-based characterizations, one local news editorialist laments the "laziness" and "selfishness" of the Canadian born workforce (Clarkson 2015). In contrast, he writes:

> Filipinos not only bring a strong work ethic to the Yukon, they also bring their culture, their family values and their sense of community. Asians in general tend to be very family oriented; they live together in extended families long after their kids finish high school. The grandparents also live with the family, acting as elders and free babysitters. These living arrangements are foreign for some nuclear families in North America and undesirable in most. It is amazing to see people engaged in their new community events, playing volleyball together at Rotary Peace Park, performing at community events, fundraising, serving their delicious home cooking, and a variety of other activities that relay a strong commitment to family, friends and community (*ibid*).

As pioneers, the original nannies are not just the founders of the Filipino community. The emphasis on family migration and reunification also, in some sense, positions them as maternal figures that enabled the growth of an entire community. The presence of immigrant families

descending from this lineage signifies change, but it also indicates the soothing presence of tradition that is celebrated in terms of family and community relationships, progress and upward mobility.

A Frontier Narrative at Work

The revitalized frontier narrative of Filipino settlement does considerable ideological work, within the Filipino community and beyond. The female figures that populate the revitalized sense of what it means to be a 'pioneer' – the nannies and their later descendants – are shaped through frontier narratives even as they stand in contrast to them. Securing a space for Filipinos in the Yukon, frontier narratives also facilitate forms of silencing and erasure within a larger discourse of national progress. The open and overt celebration of family relationships and migratory networks in Yukon renders the Filipino community as one of cohesive clans originating from the original pioneers, and thus as a community of extended heteronormative families. This, and the 'celebration myth' of pioneer success, risks silencing some of the problems with the immigration program, as well as racialized labour conditions that ensure that most newcomers work 2-3 jobs to support and sponsor their families. Although immigration through the YNP is relatively recent (since 2007) and thus it is likely too soon to make a long-term forecast, it is unclear that this point of entry will be easily or quickly transcended for those who migrate through the YNP. In the words of a local Filipino resident: "You know the hotels, it's all Filipinos now. The restaurants, the fast food, the Canadian Tire, Home Hardware, Superstore. It's all Filipinos. McDonalds. It's all Filipinos. Tim Hortons" (Interview 7). Speaking positively about the reliability of Filipino workers, another interviewee told us: "Especially under the Yukon Nominee Program, although they are required to stay for two years [with the employer who sponsors them], many of them stay working with them longer than their contracts. Some of them

came in 2007 [to work as clerks for Canadian Tire] and they are still there" (Interview 1).

Other interviewees spoke of the relations of debt that develop within Filipino families as a result of patterns of family sponsorship and the difficulties of challenging an employer because this would bring shame to the family member who recommended them for the job. One of the more critical Filipino interviewees drew a distinction between the success of the pioneers and later generations of Filipino immigrants:

> So yes, it's true. The ones that have been here, 80s, 90s, even early 2000 [before the YNP…] they are successful. They have government jobs now. It's true they run businesses now. They have trucks and they go hunting and they have their ATVs and they really embrace this Northern lifestyle. […] But the ones that are working in Tim Hortons and Walmart and all of the low-end jobs: they're working two to three jobs, they live in apartments in Riverdale where they have 5 people in a one bedroom apartment (Interview 6).

And yet within dominant narratives of Filipino migration to Yukon, the larger Filipino community is portrayed as a facilitator of freedom rather than as a constraint. The modes of descent that are at the heart of the community's phenomenal growth in Whitehorse thus reach not only backwards into historical settlement but forward into the present. New generations of Yukon's 'pioneers' represent a new face of an inherited legacy. No one disputes the success of the pioneer Filipinas but the work of the frontier narrative in muting critical assessment of contemporary immigration through the YNP bears close examination. The frontier is a utopic imaginary that implicates the development of new communities who carry on the work of actualizing the frontier's potential. In turn, these changes feed into the larger imaginative project of a 'frontier Yukon.'

Accounts of Filipino immigration also resound in a broader context of colonial erasure and the Canadian settler state that additionally constitute and complicate imaginaries of a 'frontier Yukon.' Pioneer, Neil Smith (1996) noted, is itself a conceited term that implies uninhabited space prior to arrival (xvi). The frontier thus operates as a technology of ordering not only within its most visible figurations but also outside of them. The myth itself, even as it takes up new meaning in new contexts, settles on top of the ongoing history of settler colonialism that it sanctions. Walcher's film, for example, portrays the frontier as a zone of encounter but limits those encounters to Filipino newcomers and Whitehorse residents who were previously figured at the center of the frontier myth. Even the casual adoption of Gold Rush clichés writes over encounters with Indigenous peoples that pre-figure the necessity of the frontier myth. This writing over mutes a low-volume debate in contemporary Yukon about whether the importation of workers from the Philippines for low-skilled jobs potentially displaces Indigenous workers (for a fuller discussion see, Johnston and Pratt 2017).

Like earlier frontier myths, narratives of the success of Yukon's Filipino newcomers also facilitate a vision of national development, in this case by establishing Yukon at the fore of progressive development. Filipino success in Whitehorse is commonly contrasted to the possibilities that exist for Filipino newcomers in the Canadian south:

> One good thing about the Yukon is that, yeah you work here for two years as a Yukon Nominee, or at Canadian Tire. And then once you're done with your contract you become permanent resident and then you can go to school, you can, you have more opportunities compared to say one in Vancouver. I actually know of one nanny, Filipino nanny, in Vancouver. And she was working for this family for 15 years. And she still doesn't have a house. I mean she was given an old car and she was still doing the same thing. And the

> kids have grown up and she's still there, like doing whatever she can. And I look at her, and I look at the person here in the Yukon, and the person here in the Yukon has more opportunities (Interview 2).

Or: "In Vancouver, I've got so many friends who have been in Vancouver a long time now and they have difficulty in investing because it's too expensive right? Here, […] the new generations, the new families that come, when they arrive, because they already have their family, after a year […] they're able to buy a new vehicle" (Interview 8). Whitehorse comes to be conceptualized as a rare pocket of opportunity in Canada; it is a place of utopic potential that is no longer possible in southern Canada.

In the Yukon, the promises of the frontier myth are revitalized and realized in the figure of the successful, resourceful Filipina migrant. In 2014, City Councilor John Streicker celebrated the growth of the Filipino community in a Canada Day editorial in *The Whitehorse Star*:

> We have gone from basically First Nations and non-First Nations (with a significant history of racism) to a much more multicultural community. Everyone has witnessed the increasing Filipino population and the positive energy they are bringing to our communities… Remember also that the foundation of Western culture here in the Yukon was the ragtag patchwork of stampeders that came for the rush. In other words, I think diversity is in our very nature and lately it has been good to see more of it (Streicker 2014).

Streicker illustrates a shift from a history of settlement characterized by racism to a new, more progressive society shaped by inclusion and multiculturalism. As the most pronounced face of the Yukon's new diversity, Filipinos are positioned as a leading signifier of this transformation. If, for Frederick Jackson Turner the frontier was a meeting point between "savagery and

civilization", here we see Filipino settlement conceptualized as "the outer edge of the wave", potentially displacing this meeting point between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities by bringing diversity, progress and inclusion to the Canadian north.

And Yet

As a cornerstone of Canadian national mythology, the frontier functions as a technology that orders race and gender. The frontier myth inscribes mobility and agency into the figure of the self-made (white) man. Hegemonic ideals of frontier masculinities discursively produce normative ideas of women and family necessary to the generational labour of frontier settlement. We have put these ideas into conversation with contemporary accounts of Filipino arrival in Yukon. In re-counting the origin story of Whitehorse's growing Filipino community, we have shown how the common sense language of the frontier myth has settled into new narratives of settlement in such a way as to position Filipino newcomers as inheritors of the Yukon's colonial history of settlement. This frontier discourse places Filipina women at the center of new mythologies of settlement in ways that reproduce and sustain settler colonialism and racialised labour markets; reproducing heteronormativity through discourses of familialism and clan organization and muting criticism of the systematic marginalization of Filipinos in low-paying service sector jobs. At the same time, new discourses of frontier settlement render invisible the primacy of Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwäch'än lands and peoples, and displace attention from the ongoing history of settler colonialism through the celebration of multicultural diversity.

And yet the frontier is nothing if not inventive. The image of the Filipina woman standing in the snow never totally loses its strangeness. Frontiers, Tsing (2005) reminds us, are zones of unmapping: "Frontiers energize old fantasies, even as they embody their impossibilities" (29). Tracing the enrollment of non-European immigrants in the narrative arc of Yukon's frontier

histories opens possibilities not just to outline and solidify the contours of state power, but to better illuminate where this power stutters. Consider the story told by one of the 'pioneer' Filipinas:

> 1991, 1992: I called [three other nannies] one day and said, 'Let's put our money together and buy a house.' Because we were just nannies (right?), we were kind of jokingly saying, 'Are you dreaming or hallucinating?' And I said, 'There's no harm in trying. We can just check it out.' I remember we got dressed up, because we really wanted to represent ourselves. We go into the CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce]. It was really easy. We never thought [we would get a mortgage]. At that time we were being paid 6.50 an hour. So we put our salary [together]. And then we were laughing because when we came out -- after 15-20 minutes -- we were pre-approved for [a] $160,000 [loan]. And we never thought [that was possible]. We thought it would be so hard! But then, anyway, we started being picky because we realized how easily we can come up with the money. So we went to the other bank as well, because at the CIBC there was a lady there that kind of treated us differently. And then somebody told us, 'You guys, you're really not asking their favour. You're giving them business, eh?' So it's something that we have to be proud about. But being a nanny, it's so hard to put that in your mind. We were the first Filipino nannies buying a house. So that kind of opened an inspiration to others. Two years later on, two partners went out and bought their own place too, and it started just stirring up inspiration for others to buy a house.[…] Same thing with the car (Interview 8).

They became known as the 'Teslin girls'[9] for the street on which their house was located, and their home would become a gathering place within the Filipino community. Read one way this story documents the originary moment of one of the most significant markers of Filipino immigrant success in Yukon: homeownership (as well as car ownership). Read another way, it is more disruptive. Four single Filipino women, some possibly still living in employers' homes, all earning close to minimum wage, get dressed up to represent, pool their resources and secure a mortgage. There is a veiled criticism of the racism of the CIBC loans officer. While certainly documenting a moment of triumph and personal initiative, at the same time – radically collective, decisively non-heteronormative and explicitly anti-racist – they are an imperfect fit within frontier mythology. It is in this friction that we find hope and inspiration. Rather than simply securing the Filipino community in Yukon as a model minority within settler colonialism, these pioneers might be remembered differently so as to bring into focus a radically different optic on the present, one in which the workings of racialised labour markets and settler colonialism do not slip so easily from view.

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[9] Perhaps ironically Teslin is the seat of Tlingit self-government, possibly prefiguring relations between Filipino arrivants and Indigenous peoples in Whitehorse that exist somewhat beyond settler colonialism as we know it.

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